

# Parashat B'midbar

Numbers 1:1–4:20

May 22, 2020



## SUMMARY

This week, we begin *Sefer B'midbar*, the Book of Numbers, the fourth book of Torah. *B'midbar* means “In the wilderness,” and the book tells stories about the forty years that the Israelites journeyed through the wilderness. The English name, Numbers, is related to the counting of the tribes, which takes place in the first few Torah portions of *Sefer B'midbar*. We learn that the Children of Israel have been in the wilderness for two years, two months, and one day when G-d tells Moshe to take a count of the people--what we would call a census.

In particular, they counted those Israelites who would have been responsible to serve in the army--men between the ages of 20 and 60. Without the Tribe of Levi--they were counted separately--the total number was 603,550.

The men from the tribe of Levi are counted separately because they did not serve in the army; rather, they were responsible for taking care of and carrying the *Mishkan*--the portable sanctuary--and all the furniture and items found in the *Mishkan*. The Levites would take apart the *Mishkan* and carry it to wherever the next camp would be set up. Then they would set it up again. When the Israelites travelled on their journeys, they did so in a special order, with the *Mishkan* at the center. The Israelites are told that each time they stop they are to set up camp around the *mishkan* with three tribes on each side. As we chant, please listen for the words: *b'midbar sinai* - in the Wilderness of Sinai.

## From Our Commentators:

### Rashi:

וידבר. במדבר סיני באחד לחדש וגו'. מתוך חבֵּתוֹן לַפְּנֵי מוֹנֵה אוֹתָם כָּל שָׁעָה – בְּשִׁיזְצָאוּ מִמִּצְרַיִם מִנְּאֻן, וּבְשִׁנְפָּלוּ בְּעֵגְל מִנְּאֻן לִידַע מִנֵּן הַנוֹתְרִים, בְּשִׁבָּא לְהַשְׁרוֹת שְׁבִינְתוֹ עֲלֵיהֶם מִנְּאֻם, בְּאַחַד בְּנִיטָן הוֹקֵם הַמִּשְׁכָּן וּבְאַחַד בְּאֵיר מִנְּאֻם:

**AND [ADONAI] SPOKE [TO MOSHE] IN THE DESERT OF SINAI ... ON THE FIRST DAY OF THE [SECOND] MONTH ... [TAKE THE SUM OF ALL THE CONGREGATION] etc.** — Because they were dear to him, G!d counts them every now and then: when they went forth from Egypt G!d counted them (Exodus 12:37), when many of them fell in consequence of their having worshipped the golden calf G!d counted them to ascertain the number of those left (cf. Rashi Exodus 30:16); when he was about to make His Shechinah dwell amongst them (i. e. when He commanded them to make a Tabernacle), He again took their census; for on the first day of Nisan the Tabernacle was erected (Exodus 40:2) and shortly afterwards, on the first day of Iyar, He counted them.

## FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1) Why do you think God chose to have the Israelites wander in the desert for 40 years before going into the Land of Israel?
- 2) Why do you think the Israelites would be told to count just the people who were appropriate to serve in the army?
- 3) How do you think it felt to take apart the *mishkan* and rebuild it every time the Israelites moved?

